

May 4, 2009

***"Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future"***

*- John F. Kennedy*

When we sentence our children to life in prison without the possibility of parole, are we merely throwing away some of our most valuable resources?

It is estimated that the cost to house a healthy prisoner in the state of Michigan is around \$35,000.00 a year. (This figure greatly increases with age, inflation, and high medical cost). In 2008 Michigan spent well over \$11,410,000.00 to house men and women who were convicted of life without the possibility of parole as juveniles. I understand that no dollar amount can bring back the victims but it can offer a second chance to those who are truly remorseful.

The current juvenile bills were introduced to eradicate the practice of sentencing our children to die in prison. However, they are by no means a "get out of jail free card". Everyone involved with this effort fully understands the seriousness of the offenses that each of the juveniles was convicted of. Each guilty person deserves to be punished and in most situations punished severely for their part in the crime. However, I do not believe that children should be sentenced to life in prison without at least the possibility of a second look through a parole hearing.

There is documented evidence that children have the capacity to change. You must ask yourself are you the same person you were when you were 15, 16, or 17 years old? I can honestly say that I'm not, and many of the men and women who were sentenced at the age of 15, 16, and 17 are not the same either. Many of the juveniles sentenced to life have served anywhere from 15 years to 60 years for a crime they committed when they were teenagers. I believe the oldest living juvenile sentenced to life without parole in Michigan was 16; He is now 78 years old.

In 2005, the Supreme Court found that it to be cruel and unusual punishment to execute a juvenile under age 18. In my opinion, when the State of Michigan sentences a juvenile to life without the possibility of parole, they are sentencing them to death. Michigan is merely sentencing juveniles to a delayed form of execution. The State of Michigan houses more children convicted of life without the possibility of parole than all other countries in the world combined.

As a concerned citizen, I am troubled by the fact that we as a nation\state lock troubled children away for life without a chance for parole, rehabilitation, or any opportunity to make amends for their crime(s). It is important for me to believe that when I vote for individuals to represent me in matters of law and order, that representation is carried out not only with stringent punishment, but also supported by morale character. I totally agree that we must punish however, we must also support the principle that most children can be rehabilitated.

The passage of these bills would not only save Michigan taxpayers money but it would also provide each juvenile at some point the opportunity to prove to the parole board that many of the once juveniles have changed.

Michigan must no longer be noted for its harsh punishment of its future citizen! We must take

the initiative and lead the nation in its effort to rehabilitate troubled children, even after they have committed criminal acts. Therefore, I prayerfully request that you vote in favor of House Bills 4518, 4594, 4595, and 4596.

Thank you for considering my views on this matter!

Sincerely,

Felecia Tyson  
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Oakland County Resident